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# Positive Effects of Peer-Led Reflection on Undergraduates' Concept Integration and Synthesis During Service Learning

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## Positive Effects of Peer-Led Reflection on Undergraduates' Concept Integration and Synthesis During Service Learning

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Service learning that features mutually constructed community-based service can enhance the understanding of a range of concepts (Butin, 2006). However, such service is often seen as "charity" as opposed to a dually constructed experience that is central to real learning (Howard, 2000; Tellis, 2011). This project was designed to determine whether the early interjection of peer-led reflections into an undergraduate course would result in students having gained a dual partnership perspective by mid-semester. Exploratory results suggest that peer-led reflections may have both increased student understanding of service learning and contributed to the quantity and quality of theoretical course concepts cited.

Conscientious instructors often puzzle over the best way to create an environment of "wonder and mystery" (Kolvenbach, 1986, p. 7) that, combined with individual internal effort and ability, allows students to successfully move from unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence (Ambrose, Bridges, Lovett, DiPietro, & Norman, 2010). In this spirit, service learning has become a natural and integral part of modern Jesuit business education. Through simultaneous immersion in reflective practice, disciplinary training and community service, students are encouraged and empowered to develop as effective contributors and leaders within communities of all kinds (Byron, 2011; Cone & Harris, 1996; Eyler, 2002). The intimate connection of service learning and Jesuit business school pedagogy requires that instructors consciously consider how service learning can be both an effective educational tool and a means of guiding students toward personal transformation (Wright, Calabrese, & Henry, 2009). Using a case study, this paper examines the capacity of peer-led reflection to facilitate a deeper grasp of both course content and service learning themes by undergraduate business students.

### **Disciplinary Training and the Service Learning Reflective Cycle**

In general, service learning programs combine course-related training in relevant disciplines with community service work (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999). Given that service learning courses should also be designed to provide content information that students must subsequently demonstrate mastery of, within-course service learning assignments should give participants the opportunity to both take lessons from the classroom into the world of practice and provide a forum where their individual interpretation and understanding of course material can be challenged, adapted and improved (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999, 2002; Eby, 1998; Tellis, 2011).

Thus, the essential role of the community service component of service learning extends beyond the merely definitional. Students engaging in service learning are not simply learning how to apply themselves to enhancing the well-being of others (Howard, 2000; McEwen, 1996). Service learners also undergo the transformation of their insight and beliefs with respect to communities in which they are working and refine their broader identities as servant leaders (Palmer, 1997; Tellis, 2011).

### **Reflective Practice as an Essential Aspect of Service Learning**

Reflective practice has long been strongly associated with Jesuit education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Haughey, 2011; Kolvenbach, 1986; Tellis, 2011). In the context of service learning, reflection involves the generation and refinement of observations regarding core elements of disciplinary training and lessons provided by practice. Moreover, reflection on service learning pushes the student to identify important relationships between the artifacts of disciplinary pedagogy and the dynamics of the real world (Johnson & O'Grady, 2006). For courses featuring service learning, the framing and coordination of reflection is important. Students need to understand not only the purpose of service engagement and expected learning outcomes but also why all of the elements of service learning and the disciplinary material in the lesson plan are included together in the course.

The literature across multiple disciplines identifies beneficial learning effects derived from democratic or peer-driven reflective practice (Burton, 2000; Ikpeze, 2007; Mackintosh, 1998; Tollison et al., 2008). In the context of clinical nursing, Walker, Cooke, Henderson, and Creedy (2013) adapted a strategy of learning circles to facilitate open discourse between registered nurses, clinical leaders, clinical facilitators and students in order to critically reflect on practice experiences. Their

findings identify learning benefits due to democratic participation and safety in the sharing of ideas and perceptions among peers. Our interest in peer-led reflection, in particular, is partially motivated by literature that emphasizes the importance of assuring trust, comfort, safety and commitment when experiences are being shared in a group setting (Williams & Walker, 2003). The research strongly indicates that it is much easier in this environment to receive advice and modeling from an appropriately prepared peer individual as opposed to a perceived authority figure such as a professor or supervisor.

Coordinating the delivery of knowledge, meaning, community engagement and reflection draws naturally from the instructor's disciplinary knowledge and experience. Institutional support and reinforcement of key themes associated with service learning play a very important role as well. One way that many institutions have sought to support instructors in this effort is by incorporating established standards of service learning into course designs and curricula. The 1995 service learning standards developed by the Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform (ASLER) described a seven-step model they believed should guide practice to assure that it is coordinated with and addresses actual community needs (see Table 1). The ASLER model, as summarized by Table 1, provides a structured roadmap that instructors can use to approach the service learning experience effectively and formally evaluate its outcomes (Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002).

We apply the essential components of this model (summarized in Table 1) in our discussion here. Within Jesuit education, service learning and all of its associated standard components are typically embedded within the overarching themes of *cura personalis* and *magis*.

### The Roles of *Cura Personalis* and *Magis*

Service learning draws much of its holism and power from the fact that it connects with the learner on

multiple levels. In the Ignatian tradition, these levels range in scope from *cura personalis*, exemplified by acknowledgment, understanding, and concern for other individuals, all the way to the interpretation of *magis* as a concept exemplified by appreciation of, and commitment to, extending the boundaries of reality to seek more meaningful engagement with the broader world and a more complete commitment of self to the improvement of that world (Tellis, 2011).

This perspective on effective experiential learning is shared by many schools of thought in addition to Ignatian pedagogy. Whatever the environment, we argue for the critical importance of the learner progressing beyond self, beyond individual other, and toward a reality within which knowledge is considered and applied critically with its broader implications understood. Hence, the results of our investigation of peer-led reflection's impact on the incorporation of service learning concepts has bearing on learning outcomes in many types of classrooms and courses.

The experience gained through intellectual and spiritual engagement with the real world fuels the process of reflection (Martin, 2010). This awareness of current and possible realities is then available for internalization and incorporation on the part of the learner through the refinement of values, identity and purpose. The essential elements of service learning, reflection, community engagement, disciplinary training, and *cura personalis* are depicted along with the role of coordination in Figure 1. Critical to the distinctiveness of this educational pedagogy is the overarching spirit of *magis* that drives learners, both as individuals and in groups, to be integrative, action-oriented, and socially responsible thinkers (Haughey, 2011; Wright et al., 2009).

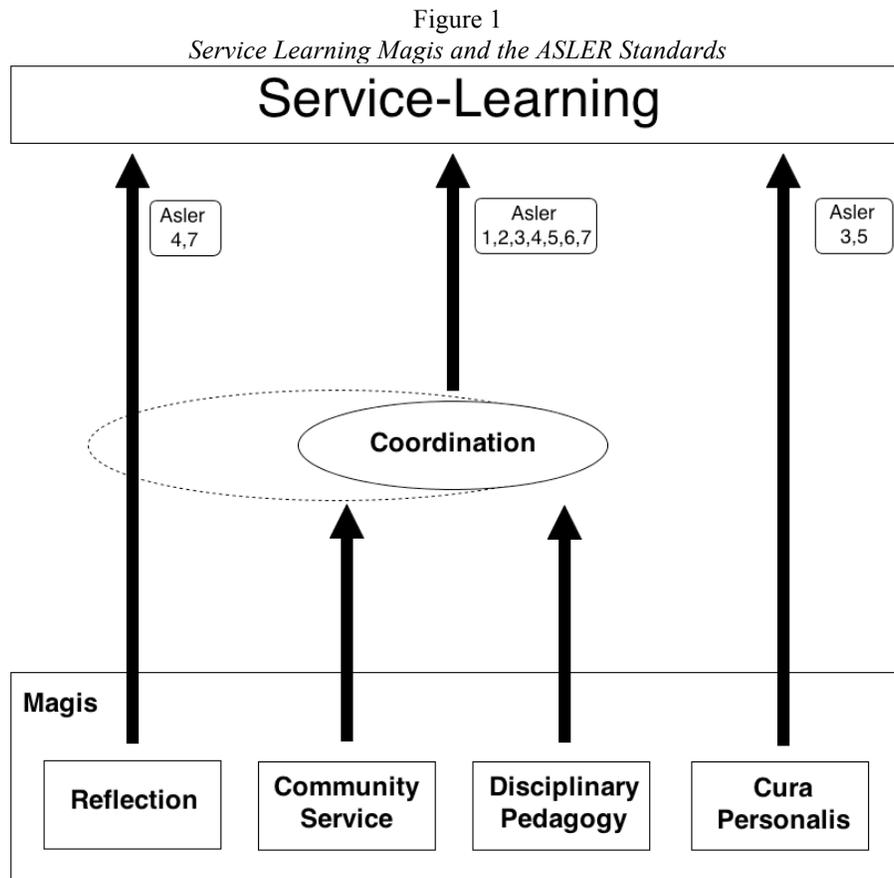
Relying upon the ASLER's definition of service learning (items labeled according to their associations), Figure 1 illustrates the congruence of peer-guided reflection and engagement with service learning as part of a disciplinary course of study. As is shown in Figure 1,

Table 1  
*Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform (ASLER) Standards*

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Standards
Service learning is designed to:
1. Meet actual community needs.
2. Be coordinated in collaboration with the educational institution and the community.
3. Be integrated into each individual's academic curriculum.
4. Provide structured time for learners to think, talk, and write about what they did and said during the service project.
5. Provide individuals with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities.
6. Enhance what is taught by extending learning beyond the classroom and permitting individuals to learn from the communities in which they are serving.
7. Help foster and develop a sense of caring for others.

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the actions of a peer—experienced in service learning—bridges the reflection and coordination actions that complete the definition of broader engagement. Thus, service learning serves as a microcosm of the broader Jesuit business education experience, defined by key learning theory inputs, grounded in spiritual balance and well-being (Tellis, 2011; Wright et al., 2009).

There is no standard formula that teachers can use to demonstrate *cura personalis* on a course-by-course basis. Rather, context plays a major role in defining educational success, particularly as it relates to the achievement of course learning outcomes. Jesuit and critical theorists (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) remind us that context is most readily taken into account by actively engaging students, instructors, schools, and neighborhoods in creating learning communities that individually and collectively generate, critique, reproduce, and transform knowledge, practice, ideologies, and cultural artifacts and facilitate learning “as a socio-cultural and political activity” (Byron, 2011, p. 15). This notion of engaged learning communities may be even more critical for the learning success of university students, who often are located in isolated

campus environments, segregated from the education that the surrounding area might otherwise provide. Haughey (2011) pointed out that this need is particularly pronounced among business schools “where ‘learning to earn’ is likely to be more pressing than ‘learning to know’” (p. 1). Similar isolation and disconnection from lessons offered by the environment may also be associated with any disciplines within which the locations and modalities for learning tend to be restricted to the classrooms, campus laboratories, computing facilities, or libraries.

Thus, in order to deliver fully on the promise of Jesuit business education or that of other systems seeking to develop students who bring high, positive impact to the world, instructors and students are called upon to work together to construct learning experiences that integrate all of these components and empower learners to develop deeper community insight and purpose as they acquire disciplinary competencies. The concept of service as laid out by the ASLER standards is also designed to engage students, via critical pedagogy, in an examination of culture, time, and change; people and environment; individual development and identity; interactions

among groups and institutions; power and authority; production and consumption; global connections and civic ideals; and practices (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). As overarching themes, *magis* and *cura personalis* appropriately complement the more specific and instrumental framing provided by instructor facilitators to fully embed the service learning experience within both Jesuit and non-Jesuit education (Wright et al., 2009).

### Area of Focus

In line with Ignatian and ASLER goals, a West Coast Jesuit university requires service learning of all of its undergraduate students. An organizational behavior survey course in the business undergraduate program allows these particular individuals to fulfill their service learning requirement. Within the survey class, the service learning component represents 67% of a participant's final grade and the various assessment aspects of service learning are woven throughout the course. While community-based organizations define their original service needs, the community partners and the respective student teams mutually design the final project. Course outcomes are constructed to allow the participant students, community partners, and the instructor to determine how well the students learned from the community as well as what the community learned from the students. This iterative process represents the essence of the pragmatic-situative perspective of learning, which specifically emphasizes how individuals must engage with the goals of communities in order to really learn (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996).

The research effort was complicated by the fact that there were two interventions concurrently underway. First, in August 2010, a peer advocate for community engagement (ACE) was assigned to all course instructors to assist with deepening student reflections and supporting social justice comprehension. Second, with the addition of the peer facilitator, faculty were asked to make associated modifications to the course syllabi. Classes were scheduled for the peer facilitator to conduct formal reflections about the service learning experience, and evaluative reflections were created. The sessions drew specifically upon the in-class work of the peer facilitator, and peer facilitator-generated comments were factored into the grades for these assessment segments.

The researchers wanted to determine what effect the peer-led reflection intervention might have had as part of a longer-term strategy to enhance course learning outcomes. As a result, this project was designed to answer two questions: (1) Did the early integration of peer-led service learning reflections into this course result in some increase in students' ability to

appropriately cite and apply various disciplinary (organizational behavior) concepts? and (2) With respect to service learning themes, was the quality of students' cited knowledge any different than might be expected if peer-led service learning reflections had not been used as an additional mode of instruction?

## Definitions

### What is Service Learning?

Service learning has been defined as “an experiential education approach that is premised on ‘reciprocal learning’” (Sigmon, 1979, as cited in Furco, 1996, p. 9), incorporating an experiential education model developed by Kolb (1984), that mirrors the model of Ignatian pedagogy (Tellis, 2011). Both pedagogies presume deep learning occurs through a four-step process incorporating concrete experience, reflection upon that experience, active experimentation, and abstract conceptualization or evaluation (Kolb, 1984; Tellis, 2011). In its highest form, service learning also draws upon the philosophies expressed by Brazilian philosopher Paulo Friere (1970), when it actively includes members of the communities where the learning projects are taking place in the concurrent creation of the knowledge that is gained. The inclusion of community members in the service learning process deliberately contradicts the “empty bucket” perspective of learning where students are the vessels into which knowledge is poured by expert instructors and transforms it into a collaborative forum where community, students, and instructors are involved in integrated yet student-centered learning models (Greeno et al., 1996).

Concurrently, it is important to assure that any so-called service learning model meets the overarching ASLER standards. The ASLER characteristics were intended to help distinguish service learning from other forms of experiential education such as volunteerism, field education, internships, and community service. Thus, practitioners would argue that the title “service learning” should only be applied to projects that are designed to equally benefit the provider and the recipients of the service as well as ensure an equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring (Furco, 1996; Howard, 2000; Wright et al., 2009).

### Application of Ignatian Pedagogy to the Service Learning Model

While Kolb (1984) suggested that action learning begins with concrete experiences, service learning educators have argued that, unless assistance and structure is provided, students may understand their

new experiences in the same ways as they did their old ones (Piaget & Inhelder, 1972). This is because human beings are naturally inclined to use the tools available to them, and thus students readily revert to ways of conceptualization they have from previous experience, a process that Piaget and Inhelder (1972) referenced in their use of the word “schema.” One way that successful service learning educators disrupt these old ways of thinking is to support students in approaching service learning with some specific conceptual tools. Among the most useful means of assuring new ways of thinking are structured reflection sessions, which are subsequently assessed and revised as needed (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999).

Thus, in the case that is the focus of this research, students engaged in an eight-step process that began with discussing what service learning is and concluded with formulating a project contract. The latter document outlined students’ understanding of the project, their questions, pertinent project milestones, contact information, identified resources, and anticipated project outcomes from both an organizational and personal level. The contract provided an opportunity for outcome clarification by all involved parties as well as formalized the relationship between the student team and its community partner.

Once the contract was sent, the student teams began work. Their service learning tasks were complemented by in-class lectures and experiential exercises that paralleled their increased immersion in the project. As a result, participants completed group quizzes and exercises informing them about a range of personality, values, and ethical theories, while they concurrently authored journal responses to reflective questions that asked them to identify how these theories were being enacted within the context of their service learning team and community partner organization. Students also examined motivation within the classroom and were then asked to explore the construct within their respective project work.

So the natural categorization that the students enact was worked through two sets of experiences and followed by critical reflection from both an academic and personal perspective. Students got to demonstrate their emerging facility with the theoretical concepts through the creation of their own experiential exercises, performance on group essays and demonstrations, written and oral peer-led reflections on quizzes (the two Fall 2010 semester interventions), and oral presentations. This process was carefully mediated, however, with instruction that was designed to increase the sophistication of students’ understanding of organizational behavior theory/practice connections, to provide a forum for student experimentation in a real world setting, to allow for the successful application of students’ general business and technical knowledge,

and to engage the students and community in meaningful projects.

### **2010 Peer-Led Reflections**

In Fall 2010, several specific peer-led interventions were incorporated into this course. The first activity involved an initial introductory session, where a trained peer led students in a 70-minute instructional exercise. This exercise was completed during the fourth week of the course.

As part of that day’s instruction, students were asked to complete a personal service learning assessment and collectively reflect upon the same. The personal assessment, which was developed by the Hawaii Campus Compact (see Appendix), was designed to measure five factors including awareness of the purpose of service, application of theory to service, responsibility to the community, impacts on students’ personal lives, and critical thinking. Copies of the tool were distributed to all students, who were given 15 minutes to complete it on an individual basis. The trained peer then conducted a 55-minute oral discussion of the questions with assistance from the faculty instructor.

The peer facilitator subsequently made 15-minute appointments to meet with each of the service learning teams during the sixth or seventh week of the semester. The purpose of these meetings was to ask questions about team progress and reflect upon project experiences prior to each student team’s finalization of their mid-semester team report. The peer facilitator then conducted an in-class session during the ninth semester week to discuss the various teams’ mid-term progress reports and provide written reflections on the same; these written comments were submitted to the course instructor. While the peer facilitator’s written remarks were not factored into the final mid-semester grades, they did influence the course instructor’s evaluation of each student team’s reports.

The methodology described in the next section was designed to examine the general course service learning outcomes and to determine if the described Fall 2010 interventions triggered any increase over previous semesters in the numbers or quality of organizational behavior concepts cited in individual student mid-semester reflection essays.

### **Methods**

To determine whether service learning outcomes were enhanced as a result of incorporating peer-led reflections, individual midterm reaction essays from the Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010 classes were reviewed. These reflection essays were selected because they are typically completed mid-semester,

permitting changes in direction and instructor emphasis at a sufficiently early stage in the course. Students were asked to summarize their service learning experiences and align relevant organizational behavior concepts they had either observed or practiced by this stage of the course. This allowed for an assessment as to whether, at that point in time, students were viewing their service as a one-way or a reciprocal experience with respect to helping and learning.

In order to obtain a representative sample, the names of students from all three semesters were placed on an alphabetical list by class and associated student identification number then sequentially numbered. A SPSS random numbers table (Shavelson, 1996) was applied to the student identification numbers and used to identify a convenience sample of 15 student essays each from the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters respectively, bringing the pre-intervention sample size to 30. The same process was used to produce a post-intervention sample of 30 essays using students from the Fall 2010 semester. Grades, gender, and the associated essays were analyzed for each of the 60 sampled student sets.

The analysis used the classical iterative approach described by Boyatzis (1998) as cycling through the essay data (Lewis, 1998). The open inductive coding was managed using a combination of Word, Excel, and NVivo9 software in order to provide maximum flexibility to iteratively build codes in the spirit of the hermeneutic circle (Dewey, 1920). The unit of analysis was the individual student essay and the unit of coding was “the entire response, the response to each questions, the paragraph, or the sentence” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 64).

The resulting summary compared the averaged overall grades accorded to essays from the three semesters, listed the gender of respondents, and identified the theories each individual cited in the service learning segment of his/her midterm reflective essays. A total of 145 codable narratives (Boyatzis, 1998) were identified from the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semester responses; a total of 176 codable narratives were identified from the Fall 2010 semester. Using the constant comparison method (Boyatzis, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), these codable

narratives were grouped into various sub-themes. Using a simple affinity mapping technique, the sub-themes were then grouped into logically connected themes: 13 sub-themes were identified for the Fall 2009 semester, 15 for the Spring 2010 semester, and 21 for the Fall 2010 semester. Finally, the themes were grouped into two categories of “report” versus “analysis” using the methods described by Boyatzis (1998). These final two categories provided a secondary context for the examined concepts.

## Results and Discussion

### Grades

Six men and nine women were part of the Fall 2009 sample, seven men and eight women made up the Spring 2010 sample, and 24 women and six men made up the Fall 2010 sample. Comparison of average grades, grades by semester, and gender across each semester sample revealed less than a one point difference between all three averaged sample semester scores. These results, as summarized in Table 2, indicate that neither semester nor gender had a statistically significant impact on the overall grades achieved on the respective essays.

### Reporting Rather than Reflection

Ten of the 15 Fall 2009 midterm reaction papers were classified as being merely reports as opposed to reflective essays. The distinction between a report and an analysis refers to whether a majority of an individual’s essay focused on what happened without a corresponding indication as to why the student thought such activities occurred, as viewed through the lens of the organizational theories that had been studied as of that point in time. A similar pattern occurred in the following two semesters: eight of the 15 Spring 2010 and 24 of the 30 Fall 2010 midterm reaction papers were classified as only being reports. This desired demonstration of increased critical thinking did not appear in a majority of the evaluated student essays by mid-semester either before or after the peer-led reflections were incorporated into the course instruction.

Table 2  
*Comparison of Students’ Essay Scores: Overall Class Mean and Mean by Gender*

Semester	Overall class <i>M</i>	Males <i>M</i>	Females <i>M</i>
Fall 2009	28.66	28.25	28.75
Spring 2010	27.65	27.75	27.50
Fall 2010	27.58	27.95	28.25

*Note.* Maximum achievable = 30 points.

**Emerging Concepts—Fall 2009 and Spring 2010**

In both the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters, concepts discussed in the mid-term service learning essays tended to fall into one of two categories: students reported on their service learning experiences either from the perspectives of themselves as individuals (individual-focused) or as participants within their respective service learning teams (team-focused). Typically the nouns “I” or “we” were used in the essays along with

organizational behavior concepts, such as communication, behavior modification, emotional intelligence, individual values, ethics, feedback, groupthink, goals, team cohesion, cooperation, roles, stress, and time management. Each of these concepts falls into the individual characteristics, individual mechanisms, or group mechanisms themes as categorized by the course textbook and supportive materials. Examples from the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 essays are included as the first two rows of Table 3.

Table 3  
*Selected Excerpts from the Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010 Midterm Reaction Essays*

Type of analysis	Gender	Semester	Excerpt
Individual-focused report (Contains mostly “I/we”-centered statements)	Female	Fall 2009	The <b>first component we had to learn was Survey Monkey</b> because in the email we included a short survey in order to get the best possible response from the alumni. <b>Next, we also had to learn how to use mail merge</b> because we were emailing a large number of people but also had specific information that had to be personalized to each alumni. <b>Being in a group</b> helped with learning these new tools because we were <b>able to help each other</b> in the learning process.
Team-focused analysis (Identifies and discusses internalization of key OB concepts)	Male	Spring 2010	We experienced the <b>termination</b> of a teammate, who exercised his <b>counterpower by manipulating our kindness to make us feel bad</b> about not keeping him on the team. This challenge, in some ways, <b>united us to see the power of the distributive justice ethical principle</b> , because <b>we did not want any social loafing</b> on our team. We also figured out the <b>major team-roles each of us had demonstrated</b> .
Mutual-focus analysis (Discusses what individual learned and internalized in connection with the organization’s purpose and mission)	Female	Fall 2010	After our first introductory meeting, our group decided to split into two teams...as part of the fundraising team, . . . I worked on a grant proposal due at the end of September . . . including a history of the organization and reasons for its founding. . . . <b>This research gave us a real understanding for why the organization was started</b> rather than just hearing it from our community partner (far less real). <b>I am grateful to have such an in depth understanding of what Rwandans continue to face</b> (health care, legal rights, etc.).
Mutual-focus analysis (Discusses what the individual learned and internalized in connection with the partner’s purpose and marketing concepts previously learned)	Male	Fall 2010	I recently visited the store, and <b>walked around the surrounding neighborhood</b> . I noticed the <b>majority of people</b> . . . had headphones in, and <b>were not paying close attention to their surroundings</b> . <b>I could only think of the negative affect this self-isolation could have on the marketing of the bookstore</b> itself. . . . Parking in this area is limited, so signage and <b>special activities to grab the attention of the population who are street shoppers</b> could be key to the success of the company. . . . <b>I am excited to see what . . . we are learning about how marketing works</b> . . . . Our hopes are that we may turn this bookstore into a popular destination for young and old readers alike, and to diversify their customer base, so that scholars and enthusiasts from the Japanese community may find interest in the literature.

*Note.* Key organizational behavior concepts highlighted are in **bold** font.

As shown by the Fall 2009 essay excerpt in Table 3, the student simply reported on the various steps she and her team took to carry out the assignment for her community partner. Little insight is gained about what the student or community partner learned as a result of this effort. In the selected Spring 2010 team-focused analysis, the student discussed the group factors that, from his perspective, led to the termination of a team member who had violated the individual's and team's sense of distributive justice. He discussed the power and influence relationship experiences that he and his team had, drawing upon course discussions related to the concept of social loafing. This essay identifies the rationale behind the student's use of the listed concepts, allowing the reader to gain some understanding as to how the student is internalizing the listed concepts.

In only a few cases did the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 essays move to the organizational level of analysis, describing the ways that students believed staff within their community partner organizations engaged in emotional intelligence or demonstrated organizational commitment. Some students also indicated how important the interaction with their respective community partner or the surrounding community was to their understanding of the purpose of their project or the mission of their community partner. Where they occurred, these organizational analyses more closely corresponded to the service learning outcomes outlined in ASLER standards six and seven (see Table 1). However, the researchers found that this more nuanced response was the exception rather than the norm, occurring in only about seven of the 30 (23%) Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 sample essays examined.

While this result was not completely unexpected, given the fact that some students never break away from having a volunteer or charity perspective, it was nonetheless revealing. Furthermore, the fact that, despite being given the same written instructions as their Fall 2009 counterparts, relatively fewer Spring 2010 students correctly applied the analysis criteria to their mid-semester work indicated a limitation: students needed additional and consistent oral reinforcement regarding the expectation that the reflection papers demonstrate enhanced knowledge and understanding as one of several ways that class learning outcomes were being evaluated. In response to this issue, the instructor welcomed the offer of a peer facilitator and the incorporation of early semester, in-class, peer-led reflections into the overall course and assessment process, believing this would aid in increasing the numbers of essays demonstrating a deeper internalization of organizational behavior concepts. The results of these interventions are discussed in the next section.

### **Emerging Concepts—Fall 2010**

When Fall 2010 semester essays were compared with their Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 counterparts, the balance between the three categories of individual, team, and organizational assessments had notably changed: there were more overall organizational behavior concepts included in the Fall 2010 responses as well as more organizationally-focused rather than individually or team-focused assessments. Overall, the researchers found that 11 out of the 30 (37%) essays examined had some significant organizational components, a change that could not be attributed solely to chance. Two examples of the organizational analysis narratives are included on Table 3.

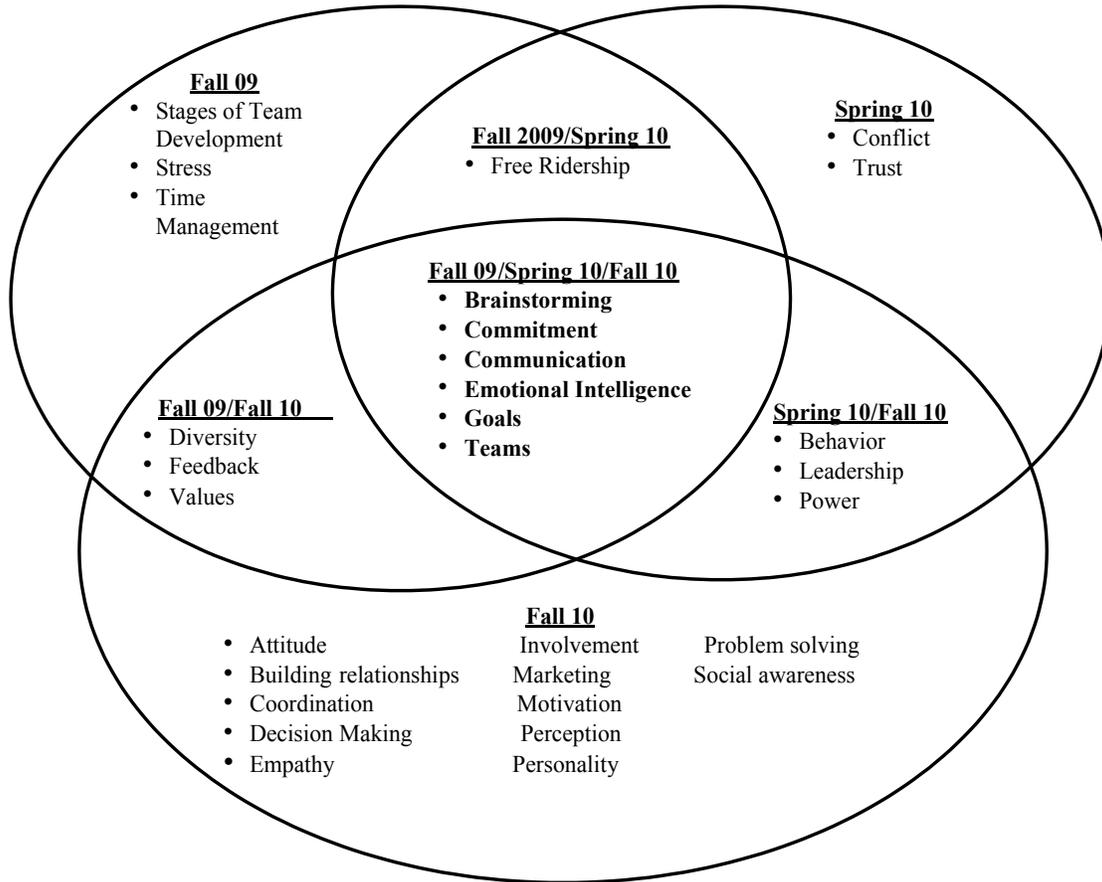
When one examines the two Table 3 organizational level analyses from Fall 2010, the evidence of more comprehensive student learning is clear. In the first case, the student focused on the real-life importance of her project. She then identified the organization's purpose, the feelings she took away from her efforts, and the reasons why she was engaged in required service. In the second example, the student combines new organizational behavior information with his previously acquired marketing knowledge to consider how he can leverage both in his work with his community partner.

The two organizational analysis samples demonstrate that ASLER standards six (mutual connection with community) and seven (caring for others) are on the way to being met with both of these students. It is equally clear that the students who submitted individual or team-focused summaries about their service learning experiences may not have acquired the higher level skills outlined in the latter two ASLER standards. Figure 2 provides a visual comparison of the differences between the Fall 2009, Spring 2010 and Fall 2010 analyses. The diagram indicates that the two Fall 2010 interventions appeared to have been successful in enhancing student demonstrations of learned organizational behavior concepts as well as increasing the level of organizational analyses incorporated into students' midterm essays.

### **Peer Facilitation of Bridging, Synthesis, and Integration**

The inclusion of peer-led reflections in the Fall 2010 organizational behavior curriculum was motivated by the desire to promote a deeper organizational focus as well as true service learning among the instructed students. Comparison of the Fall 2010 essays with their Spring 2010 and Fall 2009 counterparts indicates a desirable shift of emphasis in student thinking. Post-intervention essays indicate not only increased

Figure 2  
*Comparison of Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010 Essay Sub-Themes*



bridging, integration, and synthesis of organizational behavior insight but also an enhanced understanding of the importance and reciprocal nature of service learning.

Instructors and graders often encounter disconnected embedment of terms within reflection essays. However, focused instruction and proper framing of learning experiences can provide students with the stepping stones needed to move fluidly between concepts as they engage in a process of critical thinking that can yield superior learning outcomes (Ambrose et al., 2010). Examination of the most prevalent concepts within the Fall 2010 data indicates the emergence of conceptual bridging and integration less prominent in the essays of students who did not engage in peer-led reflection in previous semesters. As Table 4 illustrates, while the work from previous semesters tended to include subject matter without emphasis on synthesis or development of insight, nearly all of the terms and concepts that emerged in the semester with peer-guided reflection may be viewed as more comprehensive, integrative, and practice-oriented.

It is noteworthy that the interventions also facilitated the emergence of social awareness and related extensions that are logical evidence when the core objectives of service learning are being effectively pursued. One of the biggest challenges educators may face when incorporating service learning into a business or other technical course is inculcating within the student a solid understanding of why this experience can be so powerful and beneficial. Hearing how meaningful and important service learning is from a fellow student appeared to help bring this message home.

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations associated with this exploratory analysis. First, no attempt was made to analyze these essays in light of the individual student’s overall academic capacity. The midterm reports were examined as an isolated measure, not within the context of whether one was looking at an “A” student, “B” student, or so forth. It is possible that those students

Table 4  
*Comparison of Pre and Post-Intervention Organizational Behavior Knowledge*

Persistent course terms and concepts (Found before and after intervention)	Relevance and applications (Found only after intervention)
Brainstorming	Decision-making, problem solving
Communication, commitment, goals, teams	Building relationships, coordination, involvement
Emotional intelligence	Perception, personality, attitude, empathy
Service learning (implicit)	Social awareness, building relationships, involvement, empathy

*Note.* Prevalent themes from non-intervention essays and corresponding relevance and application insights that appeared after intervention.

who submitted more comprehensive service learning responses were also students who generally tended to do high quality university work.

Second, the midterm reflection essays were written mid-semester prior to the time when the students participated in a comprehensive course examination. As part of preparing for the comprehensive examination, the students are asked to review and reflect upon all of the introduced organizational behavior concepts. One would expect that this reflection would refresh the students’ associated vocabulary and increase its effective usage in an associated essay. Perhaps many of the students at mid-semester were still using non-organizational behavior language to describe their service learning experiences due to the lack of reinforcement and/or coaching that a midterm examination automatically provides.

Third, while the written instructions were identical, there may have been some differences in the oral instructions given by the professor to the Fall 2009, Spring 2010, and Fall 2010 students regarding how they were to analyze their mid-semester service learning experiences rather than merely report them. Increased emphasis might have caused the increase in the number of midterm reaction paper analyses in Fall 2010 and Spring 2010 as opposed to those obtained in Fall 2009. It will be important for the instructor to write out her oral instructions and potentially read them in order to assure that students are formally advised that one of the purposes of the midterm reaction paper is to evaluate how well they are applying their newfound organizational behavior vocabulary to their analysis of their service learning experiences.

Finally, only three coders were tasked to analyze the initial three essays used to create coded themes and relatively short amount of time (1 week) was spent in coding. While inter-rater reliability was high (only those codes that were identified as important by two or more coders formed the basis for the software-coded review), having more time as well as including non-researcher taught organizational behavior classes in the evaluation would strengthen the resulting analysis.

Further, it would potentially reduce the level of embedded biases that may have affected this study due to the researcher having instructed all participants as well as designed their curriculum. While these limitations were somewhat offset by the use of electronic software in the identification of repeated themes and narratives, these analytical issues need to be explored in future examination of the course learning outcomes.

**Implications and Future Directions**

Many of the business undergraduates participating in the survey classes appeared to demonstrate a level of enhanced organizational behavior knowledge as a result of participating in service learning projects, even without the listed Fall 2010 interventions. For example, this study found that students frequently referred to the role that stress, motivation, and both individual and collective values worked within themselves as individuals and within their service learning teams as work was accomplished. Students also demonstrated a more sophisticated capacity to discuss the appropriate use of goals and feedback as well as how groupthink and social loafing can negatively impact the progress of their service learning efforts. In addition, individual students appear to have gained a more sophisticated ability to detail a range of team processes including the importance of cooperation, communication, cohesion, roles, and development as they moved deeper into the details of completing their respective service obligations.

What appeared to be missing from many of the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 analyses was an early demonstration of ASLER standards six and seven: namely, an understanding that the learning process is reciprocal and involves assistance to their respective community partners as well as the assistance of the community partners in consolidating what students are learning about organizational behavior. Further, while the service learning assignment clearly seemed to enhance students’ caring for and about their teammates (as evidenced by the comments contained in their

midterm papers), similar growth was not as evident regarding the assignment's role in enhancing their caring about members of their service organization or the client community.

After the listed interventions, there appears to have been both a quantitative and qualitative change represented within the Fall 2010 midterm essay reflections. More organizational behavior concepts were identified, in general, and more of these concepts were presented in an organizationally-oriented manner rather than in an individual or team-oriented manner. Thus, if nothing else, this case study identifies the clear benefits that appear to have accrued as a result of incorporating peer-led reflections and assessment of the same into the course content. However, only 11 out of 30 randomly selected essays reflected this level of analysis, demonstrating that continued intervention and work in this area is still required.

In his book, *Deep Learning and the Big Questions: Reflections in Service-Learning*, Johnson (2006) suggested that instructors explicitly include six concepts within any service learning curriculum if the hope is to encourage what he called "deep" learning. The six steps include (a) articulating that spiritual growth, moral discernment, and social justice are part of the expected learning outcomes; (b) attending to issues of power and privilege; (c) pushing for depth; (d) cueing to big questions of self and world; (e) thinking about learning and daily life as being woven together as a part of a search for meaning; and (f) helping each other in moving from understanding symptoms to addressing causes. The incorporation of Johnson's (2006) or any other specification of desired content for guided reflection into an organizational behavior class, even with the assistance of a peer facilitator, certainly places new demands upon the instructor. However, this exploratory research suggests that the development of peer-related interventions explicitly targeting the enhancement of service learning may not only be successful but will result in closer alignment with planned course learning outcomes.

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Appendix  
Assignment—Individual Midterm Analysis Paper (MAP)

Your **individually** prepared SL midterm analysis paper should be about 2,000 words (two to three single-spaced pages) and may take ONE of the formats listed below. Please reference the Blackboard **Evaluation Materials** folder to review the rubric that will be used to assess your analysis paper **prior to** submitting it in order to assure the best grade possible.

**Option 1:** Review any weekly journal notes you have compiled and collapse them into a 2,000-word narrative essay that discusses how you now understand the connection between the organizational behavior concepts we have been studying and the community-based work done by your service learning partner.

**Option 2:** If you have NOT been journaling on a regular basis, prepare your SL midterm analysis paper with the following three sections:

Section 1: Understanding of organizational behavior: We have examined the following concepts: what is organizational behavior, job satisfaction and organizational commitment; what are some of the individual personality characteristics; and how do perception, emotions/attitudes, motivation, stress, decision making/creativity, team dynamics, and communication work? Use this section to discuss at least **10** OB concepts we have covered and indicate how you believe these concepts apply to your personal or professional life.

Section 2: Reaction to **ONE** In-Class Exercise: Specify what OB concepts you now understand from completing ONE experiential (examples you may want to use: Corporate Social Responsibility, Yolanda Young, Alligator River, Motivation experientials, Job Enrichment, Trust Building TinkerToys, Stress Research Dig, Winter Survival, Escalation of Commitment Dollar Bid, Eggperience, Nesting Boxes, Jet Fighter, Power in the Family Restaurant).

Section 3: Reaction to your Service Learning Assignment to Date: This analysis represents your 500- to 600-word summary of your reflections about OB concepts you have learned as a result of working with your community partner and the associated community. Responses that include a specific recent experience; its affects on you, your team, and your project; and what you learned as a result of this experience will receive a higher grade than a mere “this is what happened” report.

AS THIS IS A PERSONAL REFLECTION, please post your response on the appropriate ASSIGNMENT BOARD by **11:59 p.m. on Friday, October 26th**.

\* The assignment rubric is available on the following page.

RUBRIC TO ASSESS SERVICE LEARNING REFLECTION PAPERS  
 Developed by Hawai'i Campus Compact

*AWARENESS OF PURPOSE OF SERVICE*

NOVICE	APPRENTICE	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Student demonstrates limited awareness of the purpose of obtaining service learning credit.	Student expresses awareness of issues pertaining to connections with the project, but it is not applied.	Student expresses empathy and awareness of personal role in the solution and makes a connection to the bigger picture.	Student expresses and enacts personal role in the solution.

*APPLY THEORY TO SERVICE LEARNING*

NOVICE	APPRENTICE	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Student does not apply theory, or makes very limited, unclear connection of theory to service.	Student expresses some connection between theory and service.	Student develops a perspective that is substantially based on both theory and service.	Student takes own perspective based on both theory and service, applies it beyond the curriculum.

*RESPONSIBILITY TO COMMUNITY*

NOVICE	APPRENTICE	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Student demonstrates a limited awareness of personal responsibility to community.	Student shows insight into community issues pertinent to the service project. Expresses sense of personal responsibility for participating in a solution but does not apply knowledge.	Student accepts a responsibility to the community regarding issues pertinent to the service project and expresses a commitment to applying knowledge to working towards specific solution(s).	Student acknowledges a responsibility to community regarding issues pertinent to service and expresses a commitment to working towards a specific solution. In addition, student gets others involved.

*IMPACT ON STUDENT'S PERSONAL LIFE*

NOVICE	APPRENTICE	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Student expresses very limited or no connection between service and self.	Student expresses a connection between service and self. (e.g., "I feel good about having done this good deed.")	Student expresses how she/he could change as a result of the service.	Student expresses actual change(s) in self because of the service.

*CRITICAL THINKING*

NOVICE	APPRENTICE	PROFICIENT	DISTINGUISHED
Student accepts ideas at face value, as if all opinions were created equal. Opinions are stated without argument.	Student begins to ask questions, attempts to understand other perspectives.	Student begins to argue for conclusions based on evidence but arguments do not demonstrate thorough consideration of different perspectives.	Student expresses abstract level of responding: requires objective evidence, demonstrates awareness of different perspectives, and weighs evidence to successfully argue for a conclusion/opinion.